

News from Ed Markey

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ARE WE PREPARED FOR THE SPREAD OF A DEADLY FLU PANDEMIC??

Rep. Markey Calls for Public Hearings on the H5N1 Avian Flu Strain

Washington, D.C. – Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Homeland Security Committee, today urged the Chairmen of the Energy and Commerce and Homeland Security Committees to hold public hearings on the H5N1 avian flu strain and other deadly strains once the forthcoming Bush Administration plan to prepare for and respond to an avian flu outbreak has been released. The plan, which was initially drafted in August of 2004, reportedly will be issued shortly.

“This Administration prefers the wait-and-see school of preparation for national disasters, wars and deadly epidemics. It is important that Congress acts quickly to make sure that we have all of the necessary measures in place to prevent or ameliorate a possible outbreak. I am calling on the Chairs of the Energy and Commerce and Homeland Security Committees to hold hearings,” said Representative Markey.

The letters sent today to the Homeland Security Committee Chairman Rep. Peter King (R-NY) and Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) requested that the Energy and Commerce Committee hold public hearings with Health and Human Services Secretary Leavitt and that the Homeland Security Committees hold public hearings with Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff to discuss plans to prevent and respond to an outbreak of avian flu.

“The time for hearings is now, not after a disaster takes place,” said Representative Markey.

Secretary Leavitt recently announced that the administration soon would put forth a plan to encourage development of a more robust domestic flu vaccine industry, including elements that would promote an expansion of U.S. manufacturing capacity. The plan was leaked to the press but final public document has been released.

“An effective response to an avian flu pandemic will require close coordination between federal and state governments, rapid public health and emergency medical activities, and widespread efforts to preserve public order. Hurricane Katrina exposed major problems with our government’s ability to handle these vital functions. A Katrina-like response could result in millions of Americans killed by this virulent flu strain. Congress should promptly hold public hearings to thoroughly examine the details of the Bush Administration plan,” Rep. Markey concluded.

The Avian flu virus has traveled from Asia to Europe via Turkey. Today new cases were found in Romania and Macedonia. The United States and the World Health Organization have warned that the economic impact from a flu pandemic could be devastating and have urged countries to prepare for a possible outbreak.

The letters Rep. Markey sent to Reps. Barton and King are available on the Web at <http://www.house.gov/markey>.